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ABSTRACT

The Education Commission of the States has initiated a series of dialogues between teachers and the people responsible for shaping the institutional and political context within which learning takes place. This booklet draws on transcripts of several "Talks With Teachers" to introduce leaders to what teachers are saying. Though the quotations are relatively few, they are representative. Preceding each series of remarks on some aspect of teaching is a brief introduction to what seem to be teachers' common concerns. Following each series is a brief conclusion pointing out some of the implications for policy. The talks focused on: (1) concern for children; (2) the demands on teachers' time; (3) teaching as a changing profession; (4) teachers as a resource for change; and (5) teacher support of state policy. (JD)

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Talk With Us, Work With Us

TALK WITH US, WORK WITH US

December 1986

Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
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TR-86-4

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The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS central offices are at 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295. The Washington office is in the Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 248, Washington, D.C. 20001.

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FOREWORD

Teaching in America is undergoing tremendous change. During the last three years, state policy makers have redefined many of the profession's basic elements by strengthening teacher training, toughening licensing standards, raising starting salaries and developing continuing education programs.

These changes have been in response to many danger signs. I've heard that half the people who enter teaching leave in the first seven years, for instance. I know that a lot of teachers will retire soon, and I wonder whether we are going to be able to replace those good teachers with equally good teachers. I am particularly concerned about the problem of urban schools and whether they can produce people who are functioning members of society. Yet a vital resource for improving education has, until recently, been overlooked — the insight and energy of teachers themselves.

Throughout this past year, I have met some very special teachers at the National Teachers' Forum and at "Talks With Teachers" forums in New Jersey. These teachers were bright, eloquent and passionately committed to what they do. They talked about children, about professional standards, about the need for a fundamental shift in the way schools work and about their willingness to put themselves on the line to make it happen.

I am convinced that state policy makers will pick up on what good teachers say in thoughtful, productive policies that will set the stage for better schools and a better education system.

Tom Kean

Thomas H. Kean
Governor of New Jersey
ECS Chair, 1985–86

PREFACE

For the past year, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) has sought to improve the condition of teaching in America through the "Teacher Renaissance Initiative." Launched in the summer of 1985 by Thomas H. Kean, governor of New Jersey and 1985–86 chair of ECS, the multiyear initiative has already served a double purpose: it has given teachers around the nation opportunities to speak up, and it has given policy makers opportunities to listen. The result has been to add a vitally important new element to education reform, a dialogue between the people who are most directly responsible for how well students learn and the people responsible for shaping the institutional and political context within which learning takes place.

One way for teachers to speak up and for policy makers to listen has proved highly successful: the "Talks With Teachers" sessions ECS has encouraged states to organize. New Jersey was the first state to set up Talks With Teachers; Vermont, South Carolina, Indiana, Arizona, Colorado and Maryland have followed with talks of their own, and as many as eight more states are now considering the idea.

Though precise arrangements vary, all the talks are based on the same premise: listening to what teachers have to say about the conditions of teaching and learning is essential to the formulation of effective education policy. This was also the premise of the "National Teachers' Forum," which ECS held in March 1986 for 54 outstanding teachers representing 48 states, two territories and several subject-area associations.

As the Teacher Renaissance Initiative continues over the next several years, it will build on one conclusion that is already clear: what teachers say is remarkably consistent. The many different teachers who are speaking up — young, old, elementary, secondary, from the East, West, North, South — have some strikingly similar views. When policy makers listen to teachers, they will not hear cacophony. They will hear chords of common concerns.

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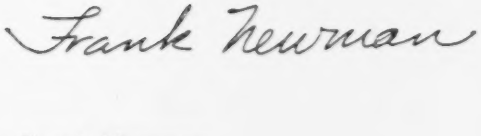
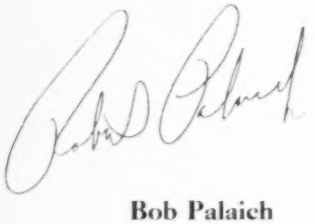
This small booklet, one of a series of publications produced in conjunction with the Teacher Renaissance Initiative, draws on transcripts of several Talks With Teachers to introduce leaders to what teachers are saying. Though the quotations are relatively few, they are representative. Preceding each series of remarks on some aspect of teaching is a brief introduction to what seem to be teachers' common concerns. Following each series is an equally brief conclusion pointing out some of the implications for policy.

Let's listen to what the teachers say.



Frank Newman
ECS President



Bob Palaich
Project Director

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A Concern for Children

Teachers care about children — not about children in the abstract or about children as aggregated statistics but about real, live children who may have eaten breakfast on Monday morning or may not have eaten. Concern for children is the heart of the matter for teachers and the genesis of many of their deepest concerns about current conditions in education. Broken families, poverty, drugs, overcrowded curricula, superabundant tests, conflicting demands — these are not vague generalities for teachers but, all too often, facts of everyday life. What they have to say has the unquestioned authenticity of a first-hand report from the front. They say it with a depth of anguish over the consequences for children that is in itself real enough for policy makers to take heed.

Listen.

> ***I'm in the classroom to work with children. I have those children for 5 ½ hours, and I'm not just working with them educationally. I have to develop them psychologically. I have to work with them emotionally. It's not just education. You have to worry about whether that child had breakfast before he came to school or whether he had a coat on when he came in. What is that child going home to? What is he bringing with him to school?***

> ***Announcements come over the loudspeaker, and people interrupt your class constantly! You have to leave your children and take care of PTA business. It's ridiculous. The children's learning is far more important than this nonsense. I mean, we have hula-hoop contests coming over the loudspeaker.***

We have only the three guidance counselors in our school. They handle child abuse, people abuse, all kinds of other problems that cannot be dealt with by the average teacher in an average amount of time with average expertise. Those children need that kind of support: they need to have somebody who can sit down and talk with them without the time pressures that we teachers have.

How do I reach this bright young man in my class who has a drug problem? We all know it. His parents know it. He will not go to counseling. He doesn't care. How do I reach the other young man who really cannot read or write very well? He's plugging. He wants to stay. I work with him individually. These are the things I worry about.

The curriculum is so jammed. Our kids are becoming jacks of all trades and masters of none. We're making them knowledgeable in every conceivable area, but it's just a little knowledge, and that's a very dangerous thing. I think we really have to stop jamming the curriculum and give our kids the opportunities they should be given.

When you're concerned about the students in ninth grade failing their proficiency tests, you're starting at the wrong end of the spectrum. You should start with me, where I am in the 2nd grade, and in 1st grade and in kindergarten. The K–3 school is most important. This is where we build the foundation for these children.

I don't see our curriculum being addressed at all, and I feel sorry for these children. They come in at 8:30 in the morning and sit in class with area after area of academics being thrust upon them. There is no time to have informal education; physical education in our district is once every other week! And here they are all day, crammed up in this classroom with a class of 30. It's unnatural not to be able to talk, to converse with your friends and to interact. I can't see any of the skills we need as adults coming out of these conditions.

I think the emphasis on tests has taken the joy out of learning: "You have to know this because there's going to be a test." Whatever happened to sitting back and listening and talking and discussing and just enjoying learning?

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We're saying, okay, give the children a chance to work at their own level. That is great in context, but then we give them minimum basic skills tests. How can we ever expect students to pass a test that is standardized when they're all working at different ends of the curriculum?

With comments like these, teachers remind the rest of us that the challenges they confront each day are immense — reaching far beyond academic matters — and complex — requiring both the seasoned judgment of teachers and resources that are often beyond reach of the teachers.

Schools cannot be all things to all students, meeting not only the academic needs of widely different students but also the nonacademic needs that must be satisfied before learning can begin. That seems to be one implication for policy, one larger issue that lies behind what teachers are saying. It's time to re-examine the mission of schools, which is now defined not very clearly and perhaps far too broadly.

Another implication is that it's time to take a new look at the curriculum. According to teachers and indeed to students of schools like Ted Sizer ***(Horace's Compromise)*** and Art Powell ***(The Shopping Mall High School)***, we may be asking schools to emphasize breadth at the expense of depth.

Perhaps clearest of all is the implication that uniform procedures will do little to solve problems that are inherently individual. Take the student who hasn't eaten breakfast on Monday morning. Someone at school needs to be able to assess his needs or hers, to draw the distinctions and exercise the flexibility that will let learning proceed. That someone should be the teacher, say the teachers, because the primary bond in education is the bond between teacher and student. Yet current systems in schools are long on uniformity, short on flexibility.

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A Demanding Job

When teachers talk about their jobs, they talk about time — the lack of it, the lack of control over how they use it. Too often they don't have time to do the things they know are important; too often, they spend time doing things they consider peripheral to their main task of teaching students.

They talk about paperwork. They do a lot of it, without the help people in other professions take for granted. They must do it even when they question its usefulness, because their authority to make decisions is severely circumscribed.

They talk about autonomy, the autonomy they need to use their talents to the fullest helping students learn.

But they talk, too, about the need for better communication and closer working relationships with each other, with administrators, with parents, with the community. Autonomy, yes, they say, for that brings with it the authority to make the decisions they think they are best equipped to make, decisions that can improve learning. But isolation, no, they say, because in other areas they need firm support from the school system and the public. Doing their demanding job well takes their own best efforts — and a little help from their friends.

How much time can you wrestle free during the day to actually teach — as opposed to preparing, as opposed to consulting, as opposed to filling out competency forms, as opposed to lunch duty, hall duty? How much time do you actually get to teach English to high school students?

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I know what my concerns are, but I don't have time to discuss them with my colleagues. I have 40-minute preps, four times a week. I have to run my dittos. I have to decorate my room. I would like to have some time to talk about what my problems are.

We become professionals, truly professionals, when we have no lunch duties, no cafeteria duties, no study halls and instead have a curriculum period, not just for curriculum but also for peer guidance, peer interaction.

Lunch slips, lecture slips, late slips, discipline slips, state forms, reading cards, report cards. . . . And everyone wants a copy of everything.

Most paperwork you can take home to do. But some, unfortunately, has to be done in front of your class — for example, attendance. We have to take attendance on three different forms. A child walks in late in the middle of a lesson. You have to leave your class and go erase three different forms and correct the numbers. Why couldn't one form be sent to the office and handled there?

When we finish taking or collecting data as teachers, we're supposed to diagnose, prescribe and remediate. By the time I diagnose 30 students, it's taken me two or three nights and then I need another night for my lesson plans and reports.

If we all had a little more communication between us. The door seems to be closed. We're so busy. 8:30: the bell rings. Classes come in. You're dealing with students. You're dealing with collecting milk money. Getting notices out. Teaching, teaching, teaching. You don't have any time in your school day for interpersonal communication. Your day is so tied up in the tasks of teaching that you don't know what your neighbor next door is doing, let alone what is happening to your curriculum.

I don't see why the state department can't survey textbooks, survey materials and make its conclusions available. Mailboxes are stuffed every day with blurbs from textbook companies saying, "This book's more wonderful than the next, and you can get so many free copies." I'd like to know who's using this textbook in the state. Who can I call to ask how he likes the chapter on democracy? And are there comparative government units in that political science book? What do you like? What don't you like? What do you supplement with it? Can I come and watch your class? Would you like to come here? I need resources.

My primary concern is the lack of support systems. Our administration does not provide sufficient support, guidance or help. Administrators don't come into the classroom to share, teach, talk to us, confer with us.

I would like people to know that maybe I do have a week's vacation more often than they do, but I cover an early morning bus at 7:30. I go all day long and I don't have a lunch hour. Recently I went to a store to buy something for my classroom and a customer said to me, "Do you have the day off?" I'd like people to realize the hours I put in every day.

A number of us have contemplated leaving the classroom, mainly to relieve ourselves of the multitude of tasks we already face as frontline educators. Take into account the precious time lost with family, the lack of time for one's personal growth, and one can truly understand the selfish need to seek other less-demanding opportunities. We do not need another burden — we each have gone through more than our share.

Some possibilities for policy suggest themselves rather clearly for these comments of teachers.

- Lower pupil/teacher ratios.
- Lower overall teaching loads, thereby building time into the school schedule for planning, collaboration and professional development for teachers.
- Reorganize data management so that the process of collecting information is less intrusive and the information collected is more useful.

Other possibilities are less specific and, so far, less clearly defined (though potentially very promising). One example would be easing the burden of regulation and moving toward systems of incentives that encourage innovation school by school or teacher by teacher. Another example, and one that is receiving widespread attention with the publication of ***A Nation Prepared*** by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, would be to restructure the organization of schools, shifting the balance of autonomy and obligation in ways that give teachers greater latitude.

Changes of this sort do, however, pose a major dilemma: conditions in schools interconnect in such complex ways that changes must also interconnect. Simple or isolated changes may not suffice, that is. For example, encouraging teachers to come up with innovative techniques for reaching particularly bright students (or particularly troubled ones) is not apt to bring real change if those same teachers continue to see 150–170 students a day. The challenge will be not only to devise responsive new education policies but also to integrate those policies.

A Changing Profession

Teachers' concerns about the career of teaching in many ways mirror the concerns of outside observers.

Practicing teachers are not convinced that the training a prospective teacher receives is either adequate or appropriate. They think that good teaching deserves good pay and other forms of public support. But they are deeply concerned that good teaching will not be accurately defined, so that systems to evaluate and reward it will be skewed at best and counterproductive at worst. They know first-hand that some teachers do an inadequate job. But current evaluation systems seem too superficial, too rigid, too mechanical to distinguish good teaching from bad or to help teachers improve.

And yet, teachers do sense the possibility that teachers and administrators and school boards and communities could constitute a potent force for improving education, if only they could find ways to pull together.

I got my education in the thirties. The depth of my background, the depth of my liberal arts education, has been invaluable. I would like to suggest, however, that teachers spend a great proportion of their time interacting with individual children, small groups, large groups, peers, administrators and parents. We aren't taught that in college and teacher education courses. Interpersonal relationships are so important. The same is true with motivation of children. We haven't been taught motivational skills.

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I found many of my certification courses disappointing. I wish I could have had more methods courses, real methods courses. Don't have me read a book about guidance; let me get into a guidance experience. I wish I could have had more practical experience. I wish we could have much more videotaping, peer evaluation and looking at our own performance in a nonjudgmental manner.

I strongly believe in encouraging and enhancing good education. I think that a really solid awareness of child development is critical to teaching in the primary grades. Unless you base your expectations on how children develop, you simply cannot teach these children effectively. You're above them, below them or around them.

It always astonishes me to think that the teacher who works with children — either making them or breaking them, helping them in some cases — doesn't receive the money or the financial rewards of someone in industry working with a computer, working with a machine that doesn't have feelings, that doesn't have emotions.

I love what I do. So can't somebody pay me for the fact that I come in a week ahead of time in September because I can't start the year off right otherwise?

Merit pay requires the measurement of certain strengths and weaknesses. I don't think it can work in education. In industry, merit pay can be based on the number of insurance policies sold, the number of automobile parts produced; it is quantitative, not qualitative. But I do not necessarily wish my raise to be judged on my students' standardized testing scores in the eighth grade when I wasn't responsible for the first seven grades.

Unfortunately, the people who decide who should receive merit pay don't necessarily choose the right people. And I feel very strongly that competition does not foster a good learning environment.

Let's have a career ladder. I don't think there's a professional who'd be opposed to it, who wouldn't mind going back for retraining and retooling and keeping up to date. I want that as a professional. But where's my school board going to get the money to reward me when I do this? Will the state come in with some funding?

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I think climbing this career ladder could make me money-oriented and detract from my teaching. I think, by and large, that most of our rewards in teaching come from the personal satisfaction of seeing children do well in life. I don't think you're going to be able to pay for this.

Why should people go back to school, unless they really have that deep desire to do better, really want to learn more? Even incentives in salary scales are not that much. If you have a B.S., you get maybe $300 more a year; if you have a Master's degree, you may get $400. Even salary-wise, there's no incentive to improve your skills.

Maybe changes in certification could require a temporary certificate upon completion of "X" number of courses for credit. This might motivate teachers to get Master's degrees. It would keep them up with changes, with trends in their field. We've seen teachers stay in a classroom for 15, 20, 30 years and never take one graduate course. They're still teaching like it's 1935, which just doesn't work for today's children.

You may get one professional day a year. I feel that teachers should not have to fight for professional days. We do have tuition reimbursement at 50%. But with the escalating cost of credits, it's very difficult for teachers to go back to school on the money we make.

You said that the career ladder is going to deal with evaluation. Who is going to be evaluating us but supervisors and administrators? I find that they can't evaluate. That's our biggest problem right now in our district: they don't know how to evaluate. I think there's going to have to be some training in that area.

Unfortunately, the administrators come in with little checklists and there's no dialogue. They just check off: you have your lesson plan, you have your other plans. They're most interested in the mechanics of what we do. A checklist is not helpful to me.

Administrators are enforcing what they feel ought to go on in the classroom so rigidly that the kind of creativity that each teacher has is really stifled. You really can't do what you feel you ought to do in the classroom because people are trying to impose their vision even though they're not in the classroom.

Supervisors, principals — they come in, they want to know what page you are on, they write it down. Everybody wants a list of stuff for their personal files. They have given me nothing to work with.

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If teachers were freed of noninstructional duties that might be handled by paraprofessionals, perhaps they would have more time to do the sharing and the team teaching and the working with children on emotional problems. Perhaps they could evaluate one another. Perhaps there would be more suggestions, and maybe evaluation wouldn't be so negative.

We teachers are asked to be flexible to the breaking point. I think all of us try to be flexible. If that's the name of the game, then why are we constantly greeted with inflexibility? Administrators are trying to do their job, yes. But I think what happens is they're not hearing what we're saying. They're not in the classroom. If they were to spend one day a week with that problem class along with that teacher, I think they would leave the classroom with a little more empathy for teachers.

If a teacher is not qualified or he doesn't improve or he can't be successful in education, then maybe he should try something else. You shouldn't offer him a contract to come back and try again after he's been given chances. A lot of us, especially in smaller schools where the individual is the department, should have a means of turning over poor teachers or people that prove inadequate on the job. We should be able to make way for new blood.

I think we need to have good working philosophies in school districts that administrators try to live up to. I think we need to see our school board members and our administrators as supportive of schools and not as representing voters who want to save money. I think that if schools are going to be good learning environments, communities have to recognize them as good learning environments and support them. This doesn't necessarily mean we want school board members to support us monetarily; I think supporting us educationally is more important. We want our boards to be our advocates, not to feel like our boards are fighting us.

The "might-have-been" teachers have come and gone — victims of a system that burned them out. Rather than helping them to share of themselves throughout long careers, the system took too much, too fast, with too little reward.

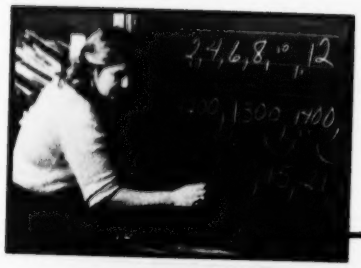
The worst problem we had to face was our inability to break the mold of the 1940s and face the realities of the 1980s. We were so conservative and uncreative in our thinking that, before we realized it, we ended up where we are today. How sad that we have been treated as servants of education for such a long time that we can no longer be innovative. We cannot even do what we tell our students to do — take challenges, confront risks with confidence. We have not had a vision to work with.

So many obstacles, so urgent a cause.

Clearly, systems for evaluating teachers need more work; checklists are not helpful, and using them instead of more sensitive, subtle methods of measuring performance tends to make teachers adversaries of evaluation when otherwise they could be natural supporters. One strong possibility would be to draw teachers into the process of thinking up better evaluation systems.

Clearly, too, systems for rewarding teachers need to encompass more than money. Teachers do consider money a measure of worth. But they value other sorts of rewards as well, like opportunities for professional growth and resources to support their work in the classroom.

What practicing teachers are saying about professional issues has major implications for policies directed at prospective teachers. That is, the prospects for attracting new people into teaching seem likely to brighten as policy makers succeed in improving conditions for the people who are already teaching.



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A Great Resource

Teachers are a great, untapped resource for improving education. With the reassessment of education reform that has taken place in the past year, three years since ***A Nation at Risk*** appeared and even longer since states began pushing for excellence in education, has come growing conviction that reform will succeed only by empowering the people who do the work — by empowering teachers.

That shift in attitude, which is apparent in ***A Nation Prepared,*** the California Commission's ***Who Will Teach Our Children*** and a number of other major new reports, seems both logical and necessary. But the shift could count for very little if teachers themselves did not share the conviction that the time has come to unleash their talents.

Perhaps the best news to come out of Talks With Teachers is that teachers ***do*** share that conviction. They know they are a great resource, and they are ready to prove it.

Teaching must be viewed as a profession — as a primary and principal profession that nurtures all other professions.

At long last, our individual, minuscule, daily concerns can now be given the right perspective, provided we become the instruments of our own salvation.

As a teacher, I believe I should have direct input into identification of curriculum and curriculum materials and into school and district philosophies. I would like to be able to sit down on committees with administrators and discuss procedures, format, text selection, grading policies.

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I think in the last several years we've lost the real feeling of professionalism. There's a lot of "you do what you do only because it's in your contract." The real professional goes far beyond that.

I think I have always sought the sanctuary of the classroom where what is precious can be safe from political poking and mercenary madness. I am a transmitter. I teach values and skills culled from civilization. I prefer to be free of outside interference. Somebody else can see to the other factors surrounding the classroom teacher. The Teacher Forum showed me just how detrimental my attitude has been and how selfish my immediate goals. By closing my doors and trusting that what I do is sufficient due to my aspiration, I have allowed two insidious diseases to gnaw away at the lifeline of my profession: (1) the lack of recognition of the importance of the teaching profession and, therefore, (2) the lack of compensation commensurate with its being a profession equal to other professions. The result is catastrophic. Veteran teachers cannot wait to retire; intermediate teachers look for greener pastures; new teachers wish they were good enough to be somewhere else; bright students turn their noses up at the prospect of taking the vow of poverty. Teachers look upon themselves as being somewhat less than other professionals.

We need to be listened to and our advice acted upon. I do not like to have parental veto power over my professionalism as an educator. If I say retention is necessary, I want to make sure that I'm listened to and that the student is retained for the benefit of the student, not to do what might appear to be socially acceptable at the time to a parent.

Up to this point, others have spoken for us to tell us our needs. We would like the opportunity to speak for ourselves. At this point, the media needs positive rather than negative exposition, and we are the ones who can supply it.

We do a lot more in our classrooms than some of the best-informed people in our communities realize, yet we are kind of reluctant to toot our own horn. You do wish once in a while that people would take notice and give recognition when you've done a good job.

I think that we need to redesign, restructure and remodel, tapping the best abilities of all of us and tying them to the interest and abilities of all the kids. I think we have to break out. I'm ready to really rethink.

Enthusiasm and good teaching go together. So do good teaching and a strong sense of human potential. As any policy maker can probably substantiate from personal experience, a great teacher cares deeply about helping students develop their abilities and is wise in the ways of doing it.

Said one teacher at the National Teachers' Forum, summing up his message to policy makers: "Talk with us, work with us, let us support you in the drive to make our schools better." Responding wisely to teachers' enthusiasm and to their great potential may be the biggest challenge — and the best hope for success — for policy makers who want to improve education.

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AN OFFER OF SUPPORT

Teachers feel that state leaders have, in general, gotten off to a good start in reforming education, though they do not necessarily agree with each and every step states have taken. As one group of teachers at the National Teachers' Forum put it, "We appreciate the following kinds of state efforts: beginning to realize the importance of attracting true professionals into teaching, beginning to listen to teachers' concerns, beginning to involve teachers in designing policy, beginning to realize the need for professional salaries, beginning to recognize the importance of education to economic development, beginning to recognize the need to re-evaluate teacher education, beginning to develop a broader vision of education."

To this support for the overall direction of state policy teachers are willing to add personal commitment to doing the sorts of things they themselves can do.

> ***The significance of the first National Teachers' Forum will be realized when all who were there follow through on the commitments we made to work as partners in education reform. I know that I will keep my part of the bargain.***
>
> ***One of the best things I've found in my brief teaching career has been teachers helping teachers. A lot of teachers helped me get started.***
>
> ***Administrators can point out what's wrong. But trying to correct what's wrong is a different problem. That's where experienced teachers, very capable teachers, come in: I think we have a great deal to offer the newer teachers.***
>
> ***One way to help improve our reputation is to talk about what we do well. I think doing that would be another way to get good people into our profession.***

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I think we should purposefully recruit our best students into the profession.

It's clear to me now that the impact of the forum will be felt in the initiative of each participant. It seems apparent that the educational community needs to join in common purpose with leaders of educational reform to identify public goals for education and strategies for reaching them. We teachers need to make time to communicate the importance of this to other teachers.

It's my hope that the invaluable expertise of teachers will be used to the maximum to ensure a true partnership in education with administrators and legislators. I also hope that the educational reforms of the future will be those teachers have had a hand in developing. I left the forum with the hopeful feeling that teachers across the country were ready, willing and able to work to improve education.

We are willing to support a renaissance of teaching, said another group at the National Teachers' Forum, by involving ourselves in political activities that can improve education; by becoming involved with state and local boards of education; by serving on state, local and national committees; by becoming spokespersons for education; by serving as mentors for beginning teachers; by serving as role models for students and other teachers; by maintaining a positive attitude toward the improvement of education.

"Last year, I didn't have the faith in myself to be a risk-taker," commented one teacher, "but this year I've been encouraged to dream. What a difference!" That response, multiplied by the hundreds of thousands of teachers around the country who could also be encouraged to dream, is a powerful source of support for better education.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR AN AGENDA

"Talk with us, work with us," the suggestion that teachers themselves are making, is a straightforward, strong possibility for policy makers to consider. One way to find out what teachers think and need is to organize "talks with teachers," a procedure that has already proved its usefulness and that the Education Commission of the States can help states set up. But there are doubtless other ways as well. Far more important than any procedure is the purpose, which is to enter into a dialogue with teachers that lets them contribute to the policy-making process.

Whatever form the dialogue takes, it should continue. The difficult issues confronting education cannot be resolved immediately. Nor, if the dialogue is truly a dialogue, can those issues be resolved unless policy makers learn to be comfortable with a new, but potentially productive, degree of decentralized discussion.

Listening to teachers should be, at best, an active process. Policy makers will need to ask educators some tough questions. How strong is the commitment to change? How can decision making reasonably be shared? How can state leaders best hold schools and teachers accountable as relationships and structures in schools evolve? What do teachers think of the suggestions put forward in the new education reports?

As important as seeking answers to these questions, and to the other questions that will emerge as reform continues, is including teachers in the search.

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Although the words presented here are the words of classroom teachers from across the country, organizing them was a major task for ECS staff. Several persons contributed to the organization effort, including Rexford Brown, Joslyn Green and Martha Jacobson. In addition, this was one of the last ECS projects that Doris Ross worked on prior to her illness and death this past summer. Further, these documents could not have been produced without the expert secretarial assistance of Barbara Deard, Pamela Stimpson and Sandra Dilatush.

The comments on an earlier draft by Rick Mills (special assistant for education, New Jersey), Governor Kean (New Jersey), Sue Hovey (teacher and ECS commissioner, Idaho) and Robert Lynch (teacher, New York), all of whom served on the Teacher Renaissance Working Party, strengthened this document.

Moving from a sense of possibility to a full-fledged initiative to bring about the Teacher Renaissance Initiative has taken the enthusiastic effort of a great many other friends of good teaching. Particularly valuable have been the Teacher Renaissance Working Party (see the appendix for a complete list of working party members), a distinguished group of policy makers, educators and business people assembled by the Education Commission of the States to shape and guide the initiative.

The working party, in turn, gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the outstanding teachers who have participated in individual state "Talks With Teachers" programs and in the National Teachers' Forum — and the contributions of the many other teachers who would be listed here as well, if only it were possible to cite the many individuals who make teaching the one profession that nurtures all others.

TEACHER RENAISSANCE WORKING PARTY

Thomas H. Kean, Chair
Governor of New Jersey

Mary Helen Berlenga
Member, Texas State Board of Education

Lewis Branscombe
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New York

L. Jane Christensen
Associate Executive Director
National Council of Teachers of English
Illinois

Saul Cooperman
Commissioner of Education
New Jersey

Alonzo Crim
Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools
Georgia

Ms. Terry Dozier
National Teacher of the Year, 1985–86
South Carolina

Patricia Graham
Dean, Graduate School of Education
Harvard University
Massachusetts

Sue Hovey
Moscow School District
Idaho

Robert Koff
Dean, School of Education
SUNY-Albany
New York

Robert Lynch
Jericho Public Schools
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Columbia University
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New York
[Represented by Mary Tenopyr
Division Manager, Employment Research]

Clifford Trow
State Senator
Oregon

National Teachers' Forum Participants

Northeast Region

Bernadette Anand
Montclair High School
Montclair, NJ

Robert Brown
Walpole Elementary
Walpole, NH

Persephone Brown
Garfield Elementary School
Washington, DC

Esther B. Clenott
Deering High School
Portland, ME

Ida Daniel Dark
Dr. Ethel Allen Elementary School
Philadelphia, PA

May Lee Baldwin
Senior High School
Baldwin, NY

Alice Warring Luster
1363 Hebron Avenue
Glastonbury, CT

Richard A. Methia
New Bedford High School
New Bedford, MA

Lawrence O'Keefe
Edmunds Middle School
Burlington, VT

Gary Richardson
North East Middle School
North East, MD

Sandra Swiggett White
William Henry Middle School
Dover, DE

Southern Region

Pam Faison
Brewer Person Senior High School
Roxboro, NC

Barbara Bundy
Robertsville Junior High School
Oak Ridge, TN

Joan Bushee
Ockerman Elementary
Florence, KY

Cynthia Carpenter
Harbison West Elementary School
Columbia, SC

Manuel J. Ceide
Alcides Figueroa High School
Anasco, PR

Nancy Gerhart-O'Bryan
Green Bank Elementary
Green Bank, WV

Debra Z. Guedry
North Highlands Elementary
Baton Rouge, LA

Faye Hathorn
Northside Elementary
Clinton, MS

Julie B. Lanier
Marvin Pittman Laboratory School
Statesboro, GA

Kerry Lockwood
Owen Hot Springs High School
Hot Springs, AR

Edith H. Smith
Riverview High School
Sarasota, FL

Nancy L. Worley
Decatur High School
Decatur, AL

Midwest Region

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Jones Junior High School
Upper Arlington, OH

Patricia A. Browne
Louis B. Russell School
Indianapolis, IN

Rick Crosslin
Chapel Glen Elementary School
Indianapolis, IN

Janet K. Cyr
Blue Valley High School
Stanley, KS

Laura A. Feld
Millard North Junior High
Omaha, NE

Carole R. Goshorn
Columbus East High School
Columbus, IN

Mark R. Hansen
Forest Lake Senior High School
Forest Lake, NM

Richard Hartshorn
Fairmont Middle School
Fairmont, MN

John Janty
Waunakee High School
Waunakee, WI

Rita F. Kelly
Bismarck High School
Bismarck, ND

Jay E. Mickelson
Pierre Junior High and Riggs High School
Pierre, SD

Mel Miller
L'Anse Cruese Middle School
South Mt. Clemens, MI

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CAL Elementary School
Latimer, IA

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J.H. Freeman Elementary School
Aurora, IL

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Westchester Elementary School
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Billings, MT

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Grantsville Middle School
Grantsville, UT

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Cedar Valley Elementary
Lynnwood, WA

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Emma Frey Elementary
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Les Litherland
Everitt Junior High
WheatRidge, CO

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Lillian Billings Morava
La Porte High School
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Dwight L. Souers Jr.
Willamette High School
Eugene, OR

Dana P. Vanburgh Jr.
Dean Morgan Junior High
Casper, WY

Karen Walker
Hazel M. Bailey Primary
Firebaugh, CA

Robert A. Williams III
Mata Dexter Elementary School
Prescott, AZ

Katherine A. Young
Liberty Elementary School
Boise, ID

PARTICIPANTS IN FIRST TALKS WITH TEACHERS

Colorado*

Karen Benner
Meeker Elementary School
Meeker, CO

Ted Bucher
George Washington High School
Denver, CO

Karen Anne Campbell
Bromwell School
Denver, CO

Nancy Conway
Eugene Field Elementary School
Littleton, CO

Thomas M. Dairy
Anna M. Rudy Elementary School
Colorado Springs, CO

Robert J. Featherston
Platte Valley Schools No. Re. 3
Ovid, CO

Michael L. Flynn
Aspen High School
Aspen, CO

Suzanne Foster
Air Academy Jr. High
Colorado Springs, CO

Mildred Gamble
St. Vrain Valley Public Schools
Longmont, CO

Glenn F. Gray
Rocky Mountain High School
Fort Collins, CO

Dorothy Ann Jones
Beech Street Kindergarten
Cortez, CO

Gail Kaliszewski
Columbine Elementary School
Longmont, CO

Salvatore Martorano
Erie Jr.-Sr. High School
Erie, CO

Kathleen M. Mauro
Baxter Elementary School
Pueblo, CO

John E. Moruzzi
Vineland Middle School
Pueblo, CO

Phyllis J. Perry
Martin Park Elementary School
Boulder, CO

▲■●

Linda Reeves
Orchard Avenue School
Grand Junction, CO

Ruth Robinson
Molholm Elementary
Lakewood, CO

Jan Tarvin
North Elementary School
Brighton, CO

*Colorado program, although related to the "Talks With Teachers" sessions developed by ECS, was an independent program conducted along with the Governor's Institute for Educators.

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Indiana

Paige Banos
Needham Elementary School
Franklin, IN

Carol Chappel
Northwood Elementary School
Franklin, IN

William Clark
Franklin Central High School
Indianapolis, IN

Rick Crosslin
Chapel Glen Elementary School
Indianapolis, IN

Florence Dykins
Robey Elementary School
Plainfield, IN

Carolyn Sue Eaton
Warren Central Elementary School
Attica, IN

Sheridan Hadley
Meredith Nicholson Elementary School
Crawfordsville, IN

Cynthia Trexler Holland
Seegar Memorial High School
West Lafayette, IN

Kent Kimpel
Peru High School
Peru, IN

J. "Larry" McGuire
Eden Elementary School
Greenfield, IN

Mark McLane
Brookville High School
Brookville, IN

Connie Mitchell
Trafalgar Elementary School
Indianapolis, IN

Betty Oyler
Western Middle School
Greentown, IN

Marylu Smith
Mayflower Mill Elementary School
Lafayette, IN

Phyllis Ann Williams
Victory Elementary School
Peru, IN

Ernest "Steve" Wilson
Frankfort Junior High School
Frankfort, IN

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Maryland

Ruth Davis
Mt. Hope/Nanjemoy Elementary School
Nanjemoy, MD

Marianne Gray
Tyler Heights Elementary School
Annapolis, MD

Morris Hawkins
Northern Middle School
Owings, MD

Martha Marshall
Brookhaven Elementary
Rockville, MD

Annette Mooney
Howard Vocational Technical Center
Ellicott City, MD

Jolly Morton
Kent Island Elementary School
Stevensville, MD

Gary Richardson
North East Middle School
North East, MD

Patricia Speight
Public School No. 88
Baltimore City, MD

Elsie Tyler
Marlton Elementary School
Upper Marlboro, MD

Edward Veit
Eastern Vocational Technical Center
Baltimore City, MD

Joyce Wheeler
Grove Park Elementary School No. 224
Baltimore City, MD

Eleanor Yokois
Mardela Jr.-Sr. High School
Mardela, MD

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New Jersey

Charmaine Allen
Lincoln Elementary School
New Brunswick, NJ

Rhoda L. Chasten
Parkside Elementary School
Camden, NJ

Robert Dufford
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Wyckoff, NJ

Ruth Harris
Oaklyn Junior High School
Oaklyn, NJ

Pamela Kolby
Voorhees Middle School
Voorhees, NJ

E. Sue Martino
Pine Grove Manor Elementary School
Somerset, NJ

Stacy Morgan-Mennel
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Charles Peraset
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Rosalina Primiano
Wayne Valley High School
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Dale Stiffler
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Sharon Van Orden
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Butler, NJ

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Memorial Middle School
Totowa, NJ

South Carolina

Eliza Blake
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Marion, SC

Mona Borland
Pinecrest Primary School
Greenwood, SC

Johnny Lamar Calder
North Myrtle Beach Elementary and Middle School
North Myrtle Beach, SC

Joyce Hite Carney
Pendleton Junior High School
Pendleton, SC

Cynthia S. Carpenter
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Columbia, SC

Frances Miner Clary
East Junior High School
Gaffney, SC

Jane Bruce Dickert
Summerfield Elementary School
North Augusta, SC

Ms. Terry Dozier
National Teacher of the Year Program
Columbia, SC

Ms. Enid H. Eberhardt
Robert Smalls Junior High School
Beaufort, SC

Jane Price Ellis
Dixie High School
Due West, SC

Marie Cousar Gibbons
Manning Primary School
Manning, SC

Jennie C. Goodman
Summerville High School
Summerville, SC

Mamie Franklin Cole Gray
Johnson Middle School
Timmonsville, SC

Gail West Hall
Bethune High School
Bethune, SC

Susan Hunter Hilton
Sumter High School
Sumter, SC

Mildred O'Brien Hook
R.H. Fulmer Middle School
West Columbia, SC

Gilbert Huggins
West-Oak High School
Westminister, SC

Julia Bates Hunnicutt
West End Elementary School
Easley, SC

Beverly M. Joye
Richland County Child Development
Columbia, SC

Mary Martha Busbee Jumper
Swansea Middle School
Swansea, SC

Mildred L. Kramer
Reuben Elementary School
Newberry, SC

Cleveland B. Lee
Fairfield Junior High School
Winnsboro, SC

Charles Harold Long Jr.
Stono Park Elementary School
Charleston, SC

Louise V. Mazursky
Barnwell High School
Barnwell, SC

Martha Bryson McClain
W.E. Parker Elementary
Blythewood, SC

Diane Page McKinney
Wren Primary School
Piedmont, SC

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Westview Elementary School
Goose Creek, SC

Olivia Olson
Grove Elementary School
Piedmont, SC

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Guinyard Elementary School
St. Matthews, SC

Susan Culclasure Parker
Hyatt Park Elementary School
Columbia, SC

Lillian Roberta Potter
Washington Street Elementary School
Hartsville, SC

Sharon Lambert Strickland
Andrews High School
Andrews, SC

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Lancaster, SC

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Rock Hill, SC

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Lakeside Middle School
Anderson, SC

Drefus Williams
Furman High School
Sumter, SC

Vermont

Ruth Allard

Suzane Austin-Fleming

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Nancy Turke
Frank Vara
Meredith Voutas
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Beverly Woodin
Diane Zilski

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